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TWO LETTERS

TO HIS EXCELLENCY THE GOVERNOR-GENERAL

ON THE SUBJECT OF THE

CROWN LANDS DEPARTMENT AND THE CROWN LANDS.

by
C. Rankin.

1847

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CROWN LANDS DEPARTMENT.

To His Excellency the EARL OF ELGIN AND KINCARDINE, *K.T., Governor-General, &c. &c. &c.*

May it please your Excellency:

The management of the Crown Lands Department, and of the Crown Lands themselves, forming a subject not second in importance to any other, to the people of Canada, will, I trust, be considered a sufficient apology for a person who has had abundant opportunities for observation, offering for your Excellency's notice such remarks as occur to him, relative to the causes which hitherto operated, and also as to those which at present do operate, against the possibility of their being managed in the most advantageous way, and suggesting that, which in his opinion is required to ensure, as far as possible, their better management for the future.

First, then: The principal evils complained of in former times (or rather since the year 1827,)*

* Before the year 1827, or before the plan of selling instead of making free grants of Crown Lands was adopted, there was but one land office, the Surveyor-General's; and apparently it had been well, when that plan was adopted, if in this office (with the addition of an extra clerk or two, if found necessary) the sales had been ordered to be effected, instead of creating a new establishment.

originated, it appears to me, in the attempt to conduct the land business of the country under two separate and distinct, independent, heads ; in two separate offices (the Surveyor General's, and Crown Commissioner's); and with two separate sets of clerks.

This plan not only was unavoidably attended with great extra expense, but it also led—through the accumulation of clerks beyond the number there was full employment for (and who were frequently appointed without reference to qualification)—to a spirit of idleness and carelessness ; which, together with the necessity for constant reference from one office to the other, led to the great delays and frequent mistakes which were so often complained of.

This system, however, about two years ago, was given up, and the offices again combined, and placed under one head, very properly ; but unfortunately, simultaneously with the reform of this evil, another and not less serious one, in its effects, was adopted—I mean the connecting the office with politics, by requiring that its head should hold a seat in the Assembly.

The superintendence of so large an establishment as the Crown Lands Office, in which I believe at least a dozen clerks are employed, and at which the most important business of the country is transacted, certainly would require (to do it justice, and to ensure the business being properly attended to) that the whole time and the undi-

vided attention of its head should be given to it; but this of course is impossible, while that head is expected to attend from day to day for several months in the year to legislative duties; duties in particular, which from their peculiar nature, would, in addition to occupying so great a proportion of his time, tend also so to disturb his attention as to render it hardly possible for him, even when in the office, to give to the office business that cool consideration which it should always have.

If in reply to this argument it should be answered, that the difficulty complained of is obviated by a deputy being appointed, or allowed to act in the office, for the commissioner, I will only at present observe, that it is unreasonable to expect, from various considerations, which to a little reflection will appear obvious, that the duties of this office could be managed so energetically, or to so much advantage, under any gentleman known to be only a deputy, as under the recognized and responsible head.

I would say then, that with a view to having the business of the Crown Lands Department managed in a way most to the good of the public, the interests of the Crown, and the credit of the Government, the office should be perfectly separated from politics, and that its head, instead of being required to have a seat in the Assembly, should, by virtue of his office, be excluded from having such seat; and in my opinion, for similar

reasons, it would be better that he should not even have a seat at the Council Board.

It would, of course, be very important, that the person at the head should be possessed of that particular kind of knowledge or information, and also of that particular kind of taste, which, while they would make his duties less arduous to himself, would at the same time give promise of their being fulfilled to the greatest general good.

It certainly should be considered his duty personally, and with proper care and industry, to examine into the management of the different parts of the office service, and to allot to the several gentlemen employed as clerks, those particular parts of the office duty for which their various talents, respectively, best fitted them—making a distinction between a spirit of zeal and activity manifested in the discharge of those duties, and the manifestation of the opposite spirit; the want of which distinction being made hitherto (and which want it is fair to attribute to the frequent absence of the head) has always been strongly felt by those gentlemen of the Department, who were conscientiously desirous of promoting the proper discharge of the office business.

With a view to saving frequent interruptions from visitors on business, particularly from the members of Assembly during the parliamentary session, and the consequent increased liability to mistakes

being made at any of the desks, through such interruptions, I would allot one particular room for the reception of such visitors, and name one or two clerks, whose duty it should be to answer their questions, or furnish the information they desired.

Although it may appear late in the day to seek reformation in the management of this Department, since a great proportion of the Crown Lands have already, in one way or other, been disposed of; still when it is considered that in this part of the country alone, that is, northwardly and westwardly from Toronto to Lake Huron, there remain about two millions of acres of supposed good lands, unappropriated, besides the various smaller tracts, fit for settlement, up the Ottawa, &c., &c., it would well [illegible] en yet to make such changes with refere[illegible] manage-ment of the office, as would en[illegible] as possible, the judicious, honest, and [illegible] al management of those Lands. And I ev[illegible] further hope, that the present will be found a favourable time for making such judicious changes, as I believe the gentleman now at the head proposes of his own accord to retire, leaving the office open, and affording an opportunity for making the fresh appointment on a fresh plan; but should he not be desirous of retiring, or should he be induced to remain, there can be but little doubt, that such a change as suggested would perfectly meet his approbation.

Should it be objected, that upon the plan of responsible government, it would be impossible to separate this office from politics, or argued that according to that plan, it is either necessary or expedient, that the head of the department should have a seat in the Assembly, there is not a precedent wanting, I believe (in the instance of the headship of the Board of Works, before the recent changes in that Board,) for a deviation from that rule; but whether there has been already any instance of deviation or not, it must strike any calm and disinterested observer, that whatever the plan of responsible government* requires with regard to the management of this office, the good of the country at large, and the interests of the Crown, both require, that the whole time and the undivided attention, as I before observed, of an active, enlightened and industrious head, should be given to the object of managing it, as correctly as possible; nor can I for a moment doubt, that the representatives of the country—shortly to be in parliament assembled—would readily vote for any change which would seem likely to promote that object.

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* All of us admitting that the most practical responsibility, or the feeling of responsibility most certain to be productive of practical good, is that which is felt by the individual to the Source of all power—I yet would not by any means be understood to make light of the idea of public officers' being held accountable to human authority for their conduct in office.

In offering the foregoing observations, I do so from a conscientious belief in their correctness; and with no other motive than to be instrumental in promoting the public good.

I have the honour to be,

Your Excellency's humble,

and obedient Servant,

C. RANKIN.

Toronto, May 20, 1847.

SUGGESTIONS AS TO THE MANAGEMENT

OF

THE CROWN LANDS.

CROWN LANDS.

To His Excellency the EARL OF ELGIN AND KINCARDINE, *K.T., Governor-General, &c. &c. &c.*

May it please your Excellency:

In a former letter I observed, that the management of the Crown Lands Department, and of the Crown Lands themselves, formed a subject of great importance to the Canadian public at large, and in that letter, having first expressed my thoughts as to the causes of failure in management, with regard to the office, hitherto, I ventured to offer an opinion as to what changes were requisite to give hope of better management for the future.

I now beg leave with reference to the Crown Lands themselves—or rather, in the present instance, I shall confine my view to the two million acre tract, referred to in that letter, to offer for your Excellency's consideration, a plan for managing or disposing of them, which it appears to me would, in every point of view (both with reference to the good of the public, and the interests of the Crown), be the best that could be pursued.

First, then: I would immediately have the whole quantity laid out into townships and lots, (the whole cost of doing which would not exceed

six thousand pounds); by this means, and by this means alone, full and ample information would be had of the character, capacities and value of that whole, immense, tract.

Secondly: the country being so surveyed and known, I would select in different parts, at convenient and suitable distances from each other, as far as practicable, suitable sites for mills, and the establishment of different kinds of machinery, and at each such place I would lay out a small village plot, and reserve a few hundred acres around it, for future extension of the village.

Thirdly: I would then lay out lines of roads between those village plots, and also from each of them, in the direction of the nearest old settlement (to the extent to which the Crown Lands reached in that direction), and immediately offer free grants, of fifty or a hundred acres, along those lines, on the conditions of actual settlement, and of each settler opening and making the road (so far as grubbing and levelling went) in front of his own lot, and within a limited time.

Fourthly: I would then, either on the part of the Government (through the Land Department), immediately erect a mill at each of those suitable places so reserved for that purpose (with a view to its being afterwards sold for the benefit of the Crown, when the settlement had in some measure advanced), or otherwise I would at once offer those sites for sale to individuals, on the condition of their speedily building mills.

Fifthly: this building of mills, together with the settling of the lines of road between them, would quickly induce the commencement of a village in the neighborhood of each, and thus the town or village lots, as well as all the nearer farm lots, would soon become saleable, and begin to make a return, and the whole country being surveyed, would be ready to be offered for sale or settlement, in blocks or large parcels, to companies of settlers desirous of establishing themselves together, or in separate lots to individuals.

I trust your Excellency will think well of this plan, and it could of course be applied to any other large tracts fit for settlement, wherever they are found.

I have the honour to be,

Your Excellency's humble

and obedient Servant,

C. RANKIN.

Toronto, May 25, 1847.